



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

P.O. Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301
(406) 234-0900
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November 2, 2017

PUBLIC SCOPING NOTICE

RE: Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement

Dear Interested Party:

Proposed Project Description

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) will be preparing an Environmental Analysis on a proposal to purchase a Conservation Easement on approximately 15,389 deeded acres in Dawson and Wibaux Counties, Montana. Conservation easements are partnerships between FWP and willing private landowners to conserve important native wildlife habitats and provide public recreational access. The landowners receive financial compensation in exchange for adopting the conservation and public access covenants of the easement while continuing to operate a viable, productive, family-run ranching operation.

The proposed easement, called the “Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement,” would encompass a diversity of eastern Montana habitat types. The property transitions from rolling hardwood draws and grasslands on the north to badlands, and finally to extensive Wyoming big sagebrush grasslands in the south. Glendive, Horse, and Eastman Creeks, as well as several minor tributaries traverse the property. The ranch provides excellent year-round habitat for mule deer and is within sage-grouse general range. The ranch also supports antelope, sharp-tailed grouse, whitetail deer, turkeys, pheasants, occasional elk, and a diversity of nongame and sagebrush obligate species.

A conservation easement would conserve and maintain large healthy blocks of native riparian and sagebrush habitats from conversion to other cover types, benefitting wildlife and agriculture, while also providing for managed public hunting and recreational opportunities. The anticipated funding for the proposed easement would come from a mix of three sources: Habitat Montana funds derived from hunting license sales, Pittman-Robertson funds derived from federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition, and NRCS Agricultural Lands Easements funding. Placing a conservation easement on the property would have no effect on the taxable base of the property. Please see the attached map for additional information.

Project Objectives

The primary objectives of this land project include:

- Provide conservation and enhancement for high-quality eastern Montana native habitats while maintaining traditional land uses.
- Provide public hunting and recreational opportunity in a landscape dominated by private lands.

Public Involvement and Process

The three-week scoping period will begin on November 2, 2017. Please submit either written or e-mailed comments by **November 23, 2017**:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Melissa Foster, Wildlife Biologist
PO Box 1287, Baker, MT 59313
mfoster@mt.gov

Comments received during this scoping period will help FWP determine public interest, identify potential issues that would require further analysis, and may provide insight for refining the proposal or for developing and analyzing additional alternatives. Upon completion of the scoping phase, FWP will determine next steps, which may include conducting an environmental analysis with additional opportunity for public input or taking no further action on the proposed project.

If you have any questions regarding this project or scoping process, please contact Melissa Foster, FWP Wildlife Biologist, at 406-852-2032.

Sincerely,



Brad Schmitz
Region 7 Regional Supervisor

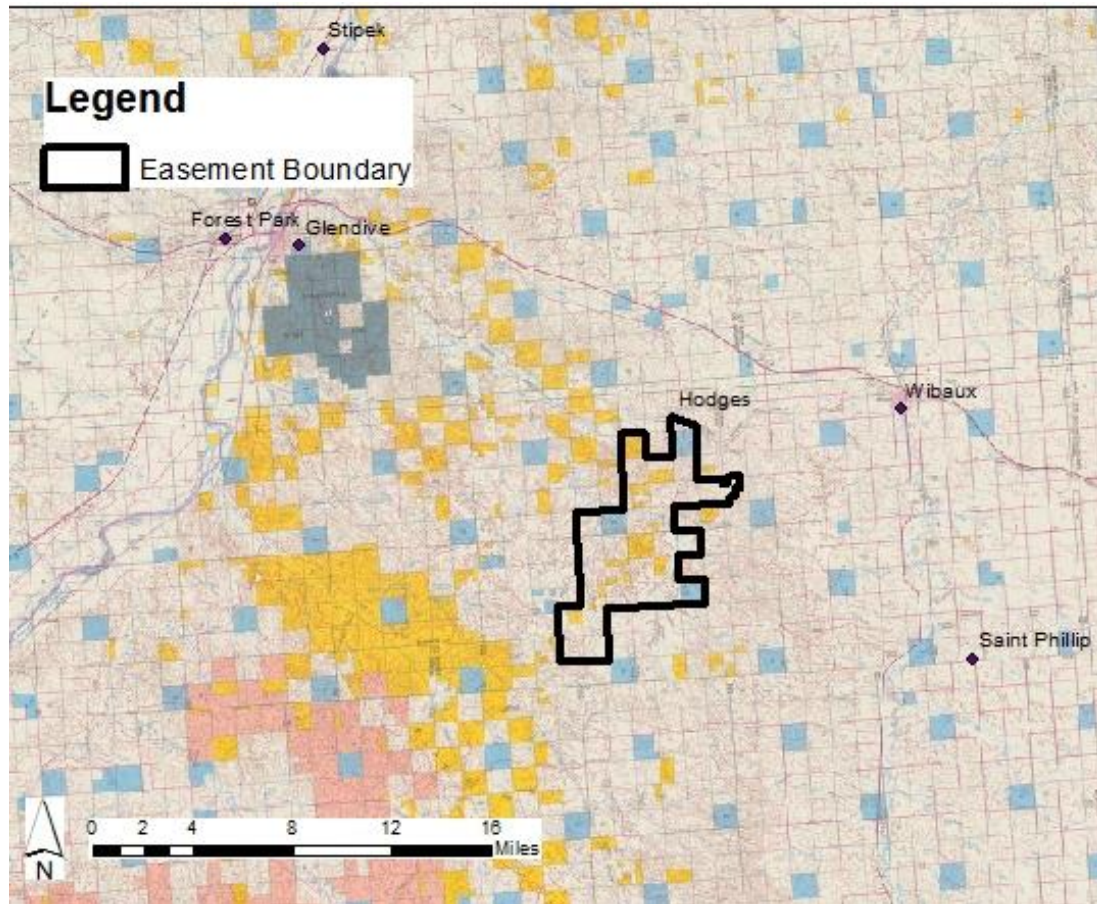


Figure 1. Boundary of the proposed conservation easement.